A DISCOURSE CONCERNING Auricular Confeſſion.

As it is preſcribed by the

COUNCIL OF TRENT,

And practiſed in the

CHURCH of ROME.

With a Poſt-ſcript on occaſion of a Book lately printed in FRANCE, called

Hiſtoria Confeſſionis Auricularis.

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OF

Auricular Confeſſion.

THE Zealots of the Church of *Rome* are wont to glory of the ſingular advantages, in the Communion of that Church, eſpecially in reſpect of the greater means and helps of Spiritual Comfort, which they pretend are to be had there, above and beyond what are to be found amongſt other Societies of Chriſtians. Which one thing, if it could be as ſubſtantially made out, as it is confidently aſſerted, could not fail to ſway very much with all wiſe men, and would undoubtedly prevail with all devout perſons, (who were made acquainted with the ſecret) to go over to them. But if contrariwiſe it appear upon ſearch, that their pretenſions of this kind are falſe and groundleſs, and and that the methods of adminiſtring Conſolation, which are peculiar to that Church, are as well unſafe and deceitful, as ſingular and unneceſſary: Then the ſame Prudence and Sincerity will oblige a man to ſuſpect that Communion, inſtead of becoming a proſelyte to it, and to look upon the aforeſaid boaſtings as the effect either of deſigned Impoſture, or at the leaſt of Ignorance and Deluſion.

Amongſt other things, that Church highly values it ſelf upon, the Sacrament of Penance (as they call it) and as deeply blames and condemns the Church of *England*, and other Reformed Churches, for their defect in, and neglect of ſo important and comfortable an Office. And under that ſpecious pretext, her Emiſſaries(who are wont according to the phraſe of the Apoſtle, *to creep into Houſes, and lead captive ſilly Women*, &c.) inſinuate themſelves into ſuch of the people as have more Zeal than Knowledge, and now and then wheadle ſome of them over into their Society. To that purpoſe, they will not only harangue them with fine Stories of the Eaſe and Benefit of it, as of an ancient and uſeful Rite, but will alſo preach to them the neceſſity of it, as of Divine Inſtitution, and that it is as important (in its kind) as Baptiſm and the Lords Supper. For that Confeſſion to a Prieſt, and his Abſolution thereupon obtained, is the only means appointed by God for the procuring of Pardon of all mortal Sins committed after Baptiſm.

Concil. Trid. ſeſſ. 14. c 2.

As for original Sin, or whatſoever actual tranſgreſſions may have been committed before Baptiſm, all thoſe they acknowledg to be waſhed away in that ſacred Lavef. And for Sins of Infirmity, or Venial Sins, theſe may be done away by ſeveral eaſie methods, By Contrition alone (ſay ſome,) nay, by Attrition alone (ſay others,) by habitual Grace, ſays a third, *&c.* But for mortal ſins committed after a man is admited into the Church by Baptiſm, for theſe there is no other door of Mercy, but the Prieſts Lips, nor hath God appointed, or will admit of any other way of Reconciliation than this, of Confeſſion to a Prieſt, and his Abſolution.

Vid. Becan. *Tract. de Sacramentis in ſpecie.*

This Sacrament of Penance therefore is called by them, *Secunda Tabula poſt naufragium*, the peculiar refuge of a lapſed Chriſtian, the only Sanctuary of a guilty Conſcience, the ſole means of reſtoring ſuch a perſon to Peace of Conſcience, the Favour of God, and the Hopes of Heaven. And withal, this method is held to be ſo ſovereign and effectual a Remedy, that it cures *toties, quoties*; and whatever a mans miſcarriages have been, and how often ſoever repeated, if he do but as often reſort to it, he ſhall return as pure and clean as when he firſt came from the Font.

This ready and eaſie way, (ſay they) hath God allowed men, of quitting all ſcores with himſelf, in the uſe of which they may have perfect peace in their Conſciences, and may think of the day of Judgment without horror, having their caſe decided beforehand by Gods Deputy the Prieſt, and their Pardon ready to produce, and plead at the Tribunal of Chriſt.

What a mighty defect is it therefore in the Proteſtant Churches, who wanting this Sacrament, want the principal Miniſtry of Reconciliation? And who would not joyn himſelf to the Society of that Church, where this great Caſe is ſo abundantly provided for? For if all this be true, he muſt be extremely fool-hardy, and deſerve to periſh, who will not be of that Communion, from whence the way to Heaven is ſo very eaſie and obvious; no wonder therefore, I ſay, if not only the looſe and vicious are fond of this Communion, where they may ſin and confeſs, and confeſs and ſin again without any great danger; but it would be ſtrange if the more Virtuous and Prudent alſo, did not out of more caution think it became them to comply with this expedient. For as much as there is no man who underſtands himſelf, but muſt be conſcious of having committed ſins ſince his Baptiſm, and then for fear ſome of them ſhould prove to be of a mortal nature, it will be his ſafeſt courſe to betake himſelf to this refuge, and conſequently he will eaſily be drawn

to

to that Church, where the only Remedy of his Diſeaſe is to be had.

But the beſt of it is, theſe things are ſooner ſaid then proved, and more eaſily fanſied by ſilly people, than believed by thoſe of Diſcretion. And therefore there may be no culpable Defect in the Reformed Churches, that they truſt not to this Remedy in ſo great a Caſe. And as for the Church of *England* in particular, though ſhe hath no fondneſs for Mountebank Medicines, as obſerving them to be ſeldom ſucceſsful; yet ſhe is not wanting in her Care, and Compaſſion to the Souls under her Guidance, but expreſſeth as much Tenderneſs of their Peace and Comfort, as the Church of *Rome* can pretend to. Indeed ſhe hath not ſet up a Confeſſors Chair in every Pariſh, nor much leſs placed the Prieſt in the Seat of God Almighty, as thinking it ſafer, at leaſt in ordinary Caſes, to remit men to the written Word of God, and to the publick Miniſtry thereof, for reſolution of Conſcience, than to the ſecret Oracle of a Prieſt in a corner, and adviſes them rather to obſerve what God himſelf declares of the nature and guilt of Sin, the aggravations or abatements of it, and the terms and conditions of Pardon, than what a Prieſt pronounces. But however this courſe doth not pleaſe the Church of *Rome*, for Reaſons beſt known to themſelves, which, if we may gueſs at, the main ſeems to be this, they do not think it fit to let men be their own Carvers, but lead them like Children by the hand; my meaning is, they keep people as much in Ignorance of the holy Scripture as they can, locking that up from them in an unknown Tongue; now if they may not be truſted with thoſe ſacred Records, ſo as to inform themſelves of the Terms of the New Covenant, the Conditions of the Pardon of Sin, and Salvation, it is then but reaſonable that the Prieſt ſhould judge for them, and that they await their doom from his Mouth: Yet I do not ſee why in a Proteſtant Church, where the whole Religion is in the Mother Tongue, the Old and eſpecially the New Teſtament conſtantly, and conſcientiouſly expounded, and to ſearch the Scriptures, and *to ſee whether things be ſo or no*; I ſee not, I ſay, why in ſuch a caſe the Prieſt may not in great meaſure be excuſed the trouble of attending ſecret Confeſſions, without danger to the Souls of men.

But beſides this, there is a conſtant uſe of Confeſſion and Abſolution too, in the Church of *England*, in every Days Service: which, though they be both in general terms, as they ought to be in publick Worſhip, yet every Penitent can both from his own Conſcience ſupply the generality of the Confeſſion by a remorſeful reflection upon his own particular Sins, as well as if he did it at the knees of a Prieſt; and alſo by an act of Faith can apply the general Sentence of Abſolution to his own Soul, with

with as good and comfortable effects, as if it had been ſpecially pronounced by his Confeſſor.

But this publick Confeſſion doth not pleaſe the *Romaniſts* neither, and they know a Reaſon for their diſlike; namely, becauſe this doth not conciliate ſo great a Veneration to the Prieſt-hood, as when all men are brought to kneel to them for Salvation: Neither doth this way make them to pry into the ſecret Thoughts of Men, as Auricular Confeſſion doth, wherein the Prieſt is not only made a Judge of mens eſtate, but a Spy upon their behaviour, and is capable of becoming an Intelligencer to his Superiors of all the Deſigns, Intereſts, and even Conſtitutions of the people.

Moreover the Church of *England* allows of private Confeſſions alſo, as particularly in the Viſitation of the Sick, (which Office extends alſo to them that are troubled in Mind or Conſcience, as well as to the afflicted in Body) where the Miniſter is directed to examine particularly the ſtate of the Decumbents Soul, to ſearch and romage his Conſcience, to try his Faith, his Repentance, his Charity, nay, to move him to make a ſpecial Confeſſion of his Sins, and afterwards to abſolve him upon juſt grounds.

Nay further yet, if (beſides the caſe of Sickneſs) any Man ſhall either out of perplexity of Mind, ſcrupuloſity or remorſe of Conſcience, or any other devout conſideration, think it needful to apply himſelf to a Prieſt of the Church of *England* for Advice, Eaſe, or Relief, he hath Incouragement and Direction ſo to do in the firſt Exhortation to the Holy Communion, and may be ſure to find thoſe who will tenderly, and faithfully, as well as ſecretly adminiſter to his neceſſities. So that I ſee not what defect or omiſſion can be objected to this Church in all this Affair, or what Temptation any Man can have upon this account to go from us to the Church of *Rome*.

But all this will not ſatisfie them of the Church of *Rome*, they are neither contented with publick Confeſſion, nor with private, no nor with ſecret neither, if it be only occaſional or voluntary: It is the univerſality and neceſſity of it which they inſiſt upon; for it is not with them a matter of Eccleſiaſtical Diſcipline, to prevent the Scandal of the Society, to conſerve the Reverence of the Church, or to reſtrain men from ſinning, or much leſs an Office of Expediency and Prudence to be reſorted to upon exigencies, or ſuch as may accidentally become neceſſary upon emergency, as ſuppoſe upon the atrocity of fact committed, the ſcandalouſneſs of ſome perſons former life, which may make him more doubtful of his Pardon, the weakneſs of his Judgment, the Melancholy of his Temper, or the Anxiety of his Mind, or any ſuch like occaſion, but

but it muſt be the ſtanding indiſpenſible Duty of all men, as the condition of the Pardon of the Sins; in a word, it muſt be a Sacrament of Divine Inſtitution, and of Univerſal Obligation.

For ſo the Council of *Trent* determins, *Seſſ.* 4. *Canon* 1. *Si quis dixerit in Eccleſiâ Catholica pœnitentiam non eſſe vere & propriè Sacramentum pro fidelibus, quoties poſt Baptiſmum in peccata labuntur, ipſi Deo reconciliandis à Domino noſtro inſtitutum, Anathema ſit*; *i. e.* Let him be accurſed, who ſhall affirm that Penance is not truly and properly a Sacrament inſtituted and appointed in the Univerſal Church, by our Lord Chriſt himſelf, for the reconciling thoſe Chriſtians to the Divine Majeſty, who have fallen into Sin after their Baptiſm.

And in the Doctrinal part of that Decree they teach and aſſert more particularly; Firſt, That our Saviour inſtituted this Sacrament expreſly, *Joh.* 20. 22.

2. That this Sacrament conſiſts of two parts, *viz.* the Matter and the Form; the Matter of the Sacrament (or *quaſi materia*, as they cautiouſly ſpeak) is the act or acts of the Penitent, namely, Contrition, Confeſſion, and Satisfaction; the Form of it is the act of the Prieſt in theſe words, *Abſolvo te.* *Seſſ.* 14. *Cap.* 2.

3. That therefore it is the duty of every Man who hath fallen after Baptiſm, as aforeſaid, to confeſs his ſins at leaſt once a year to a Prieſt. *Cap.* 3.

4. That this Confeſſion is to be ſecret; for publick Confeſſion they ſay is neither commanded nor expedient. *Cap.* 5.

5. That this Confeſſion of Mortal Sin be very exact and particular, together with all circumſtances, eſpecially ſuch as *ſpeciem facti mutant*, alter the kind or degree of Sin, and that it extend to the moſt ſecret Sins, even of Thought, or againſt the ninth and tenth Commandment. *Ibid.* *Ibid.*

6. That the Penitent thus doing, the Abſolution of the Prieſt hereupon pronounced is not conditional or declarative only, but abſolute and judicial. *Cap.* 6.

Now in oppoſition to this Doctrine and Decree of theirs, and the Practice of that Church purſuant thereof, as well as in defence of the Doctrine and Practice of the Church of *England* in that particular, I will here endeavour to make good theſe three things.

1. That our bleſſed Lord and Saviour hath neither in his Goſpel inſtituted ſuch an Auricular Confeſſion as aforeſaid, nor, much leſs, ſuch a Sacrament of Penance as the Church of *Rome* ſuppoſes in the recited Decree.

2. That Auricular Confeſſion hath not been of conſtant and univerſal

verſal uſe in the Chriſtian Church. as the *Romaniſts* pretend, much leſs looked upon as of Sacramental and neceſſary Obligation.

3. That Auricular Confeſſion. as it is now uſed in the Church of *Rome*, is not only unneceſſary and burdenſome, but in many reſpects very miſchievous to Piety, and the great ends of Chriſtian Religion.

If the firſt of theſe appear to be true, then (at the worſt) the want of ſuch an Auricular Confeſſion in the reformed Churches, can be but an irregularity, and no eſſential defect.

If the ſecond of theſe aſſertions be made good, then it can be no defect at all in thoſe Churches that uſe not ſuch a Rite, but a Novelty and Impoſition on their parts who ſo ſtrictly require it.

But if the third be true, it will be the Corruption and great fault of the Church of *Rome* to perſevere in the Injunction and Practice of it, and the Excellency and Commendation of thoſe Churches which exclude it.

I begin with the firſt, That it doth not appear that our Saviour hath inſtituted ſuch an Auricular Confeſſion, of ſuch a Sacrament of Penance as the Church of *Rome* pretends and practiſes.

I confeſs it is a Negative which I here undertake to make good, which is accounted a difficult Province; but the Council of *Trent* hath relieved us in that particular, by founding the Inſtitution expreſly upon that one paſſage of the Goſpel, *Joh.* 20. 22. So that we ſhall not need to examine the whole Body of Scripture to diſcover what footſteps of Divine Inſtitution may be found here or there, for the Council wholly inſiſts and relies upon that Text of St. *John*; and therefore if that fail them, the whole *Hypotheſis* falls to the ground.

Now for the clearing of this, let us lay the words before us; and they are theſe, *He breathed on them, and ſaid, Receive ye the Holy Ghoſt, whoſoever ſins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; whoſoever ſins ye retain, they are retained.*

Now here I appeal to any Man that hath Eyes in his Head, or Ears to hear, whether in this Text there be any one word of Auricular Confeſſion, or much leſs of ſuch a circumſtantiated one as they require; And this is ſo manifeſt and notorious, that their own ancient Canoniſts and ſeveral of their learned Divines are aſhamed of the pretence of Divine Inſtitution founded upon this or any other paſſage of Scripture; and therefore are content to defend the Practice of the Church of *Rome* in this particular, upon the account of the Authority, and general uſage of the Church; which we ſhall come to examine by and by in its due place.

In the mean time I cannot chooſe but admire the mighty Faith of a

Romaniſt,

Romaniſt, who can believe in ſpight of his own eyes. It ſeemed to us an inſuperable difficulty heretofore, for a man to perſwade himſelf that in the Sacrament of the Euchariſt Bread was tranſubſtantiated into Fleſh, becauſe it was againſt the expreſs teſtimony of ſenſe, yea, although for that there was the countenance of five figurative (but miſtaken) words to ſupport the credulity; but this of the Sacrament of Penance clearly out-does it; for here a man muſt believe a thing to be, when as there is not ſo much as one word for the ground of his Faith, or the proof of the thing in queſtion. How many Sacraments may not ſuch men have if they pleaſe? What voluminous Creeds may not they ſwallow and digeſt? What Mountains may not ſuch a wonderful Faith remove?

But let us hear what they have to ſay for themſelves; perhaps in the firſt place they will plead the authority of the Council of *Trent*, which hath peremptorily determined the ſenſe of the paſſage of the Goſpel to the purpoſe aforeſaid. Indeed that Council in the third Canon of their fourteenth Seſſion, doth damn all thoſe who deny that a Sacrament of Penance and Auricular Confeſſion is preſcribed in that Text of St. *John*, or who apply it to any other purpoſe. But in ſo doing, they both uſurp a Prerogative which was never pretended to, or practiſed by any Council before them, and withal they betray a conſciouſneſs that the Text it ſelf yielded no ſufficient evidence of the thing which they deſigned to countenance by it; for what Councils (ever till now) brought a Text, and then impoſed an Interpretation upon it contrary to the words? And then backt that Interpretation with an *Anathema?* If the Text were plain, or could be made ſo, why was not that done? And to be ſure, if that cannot be done by other means, the curſe will not do it; at leaſt to any but very obedient *Roman* Conſciences. Beſides, if this courſe be allowed, I ſee not but a Council may bring in what Religion they pleaſe, having firſt made a Noſe of Wax of the Holy Scripture, and then writhed it into what ſhape they beſt phanſy; for in ſuch a caſe, if the words of the Goſpel do not favour me, I can govern the ſenſe, and if the letter be ſilent or intractable, I can help that with an Interpretation, and if I have authority or confidence enough to impoſe that, under the peril of *Anathema*, I am no longer an Interpreter or a Judge, but a Law-giver, and need not trouble my ſelf with *ſcriptum eſt*, but may (if I will ſpeak plain) ſay *decretum eſt*, and the buſineſs is done.

But if neither the Letter of Scripture, nor the Authority of a Council will do in this caſe, then in the ſecond place they think they have at leaſt ſome colour of Reaſon to relieve them; and if they cannot find Auricular Confeſſion in the Text, yet they will by conſequence infer

it thence; for they ſay although indeed it is true it is not here expreſly mentioned, yet it is certain that our Saviour in the Text before us inſtituted a Sacrament of Penance, and therefore Auricular Confeſſion muſt neceſſarily be implied, becauſe Abſolution cannot be without Confeſſion.

Here the Reader will obſerve that the point in Queſtion between us is very much altered, for we are now fallen from the conſideration of the Divine Inſtitution of Auricular Confeſſion in particular, to that of a Sacrament of Penance in general, *i. e.* from a direct proof to a *ſubintelligitur*. But we will follow them hither alſo, and for the clearing of this matter, we will briefly conſider theſe three things.

1. Whether that can properly be ſaid to be of Divine Inſtitution, and neceſſary to Salvation, which depends on an Inference, and is proved only by an *Innuendo*?

2. Whether it can be reaſonable to aſſert that our Saviour there inſtitutes a Sacrament of Penance, where not only Auricular Confeſſion, but the whole matter of ſuch a Sacrament is left undefined?

3. Whether if our Saviour (had done that which it is plain he hath not, that is) had here inſtituted and appointed all thoſe things, which by the Church of *Rome* are required as the material parts of Penance, yet this could not have been eſteemed a Sacrament?

1. For the firſt of theſe, we have no more to do but to conſider the force and ſignification of this word *Inſtitution*. Now that in the common uſe of men (eſpecially of thoſe which ſpeak diſtinctly and underſtandingly) implies a ſetting up *de novo*, or the appointing that to become a duty which was not knowable, or at leaſt not known to be ſo before it became ſo appointed. For this word *Inſtitution* is that which we uſe to expreſs a poſitive command by, in oppoſition to that which is Moral in the ſtricteſt ſenſe, and of natural obligation. Now it is very evident that all things of this nature ought to be appointed very plainly and expreſly, or elſe they can carry no obligation with them; for ſeeing the whole reaſon of their becoming matter of Law or Duty, lies in the will of the Legiſlator; if that be not plainly diſcovered, they cannot be ſaid to be inſtituted, and ſo there can be no Obligation to obſerve them, becauſe *where there is no Law, there can be no Tranſgreſſion*; and a Law is no Law in effect, which is not ſufficiently promulged. Is it not therefore a very ſtrange thing to tell us of an Inſtitution by implication only, and yet at the ſame time to tell us that the matter ſo (pretended to be) inſtituted, is no leſs then abſolutely neceſſary to the Salvation of Sinners?

Seſſ. 14. *C.* 2.

2. The ſecond of theſe will eaſily be reſolved by conſi-

Seſſ. 14. *C.* 3. dering what we obſerved before from the Council of *Trent*, *viz.*

viz. that this Sacrament of Penance conſiſts of Matter and Form; the Form is the Prieſts Abſolution, but the Matter or Materials of this Sacrament are Contrition, Confeſſion to a Prieſt, and Satisfaction or Performance of the Penance enjoyn'd by him; now it is evident that not only Auricular Confeſſion (of which we have ſpoken hitherto) but alſo Contrition and Satisfaction are wholly omitted and paſt over in ſilence by the Evangeliſt in this paſſage of Scripture, from whence they fetch their Sacrament of Penance: And is it not a wonderful ſtrange thing, that our Saviour ſhould be ſuppoſed to inſtitute a Sacrament without any Materials of it at all? ſurely therefore this muſt be either a very *Spiritual* Sacrament, or none at all.

Let us gueſs at the probability of this in proportion to either of the other undoubted Sacraments. Suppoſe our Saviour inſtead of that accurate form in which he inſtituted the Euchariſt had only ſaid, I would have you my Diſciples, and all that ſhall believe on my Name to keep a Memorial of me when I am gone: Or ſuppoſe he ſaid only as he doth, *Joh. 6. 55. My fleſh is Meat indeed, and my Blood is drink indeed*, would any one have concluded here, that our Saviour in ſo ſaying, had appointed Bread and Wine to be Conſecrated, to be received in ſuch a manner, and in a word that he had (without more ado) inſtituted ſuch a Sacrament as we uſually celebrate? No certainly, and therefore we ſee our Saviour is the moſt expreſs and particular therein that can be, *for he takes Bread, bleſſes it, breaks it, gives it to them, ſaying, Take eat, this is my body*, &c. and *after Supper he takes the Cup, bleſſes it, gives it to them, ſaying, Drink ye all of this, for this is the New Teſtament in my Blood*, &c. and then adds, *Do this in remembrance of me*. Now who is there that obſerves this accuracy of our Saviour in the Euchariſt, can imagine that he ſhould intend to inſtitute a Sacrament of Penance, and that as neceſſary to Salvation (in the Opinion of the *Romaniſts*) as the other, only with this Form of words, *Whoſoever ſins ye remit, they are remitted*, &c. and without the leaſt mention of Confeſſion, Contrition, or any other material or neceſſary part or circumſtance of it.

3. But in the third and laſt place, let us ſuppoſe that our Saviour had in the Text before us inſtituted Penance, and had appointed particularly all thoſe things, which they call the material parts of it, (as it is evident he hath not) yet even then, and upon that Suppoſition, Penance would not have proved to be a Sacrament properly ſo called.

I confeſs according to a looſe acceptation of the word Sacrament, ſomething may be ſaid for it; for ſo there are many things have had the name of Sacrament applied to them. *Tertullian* ſomewhere calls *Eliſha*'s Ax the Sacrament of Wood; and in his Book againſt *Marcion*, he ſtiles

the whole Christian Religion a Sacrament. St. *Austin* in several places calls Bread, Fish, the Rock, and the Mystery of Number, Sacraments; for he hath given us a general Rule in his fifth Epistle, *viz.* That all Signs when they belong to Divine things are called Sacraments: And in consideration hereof it is acknowledged by *Cassander*, that the Number of Sacraments was indefinite in the Church of *Rome* it self, until the times of *Peter Lombard*. But all this notwithstanding, and properly speaking, this Right of Penance taking it altogether (and even supposing whatsoever the *Romanists* can suppose to belong to it) cannot be reputed a Sacrament, according to the allowed Definitions of a Sacrament delivered by their own Divines. Some of them define a Sacrament thus, *a Sacramentum est corporale elementum foris sensibiliter propositum, ex similitudine repræsentans & ex Institutione significans, & ex Sanctificatione continens invisibilem gratiam.* And the *b* Master of the Sentences himself describes it somewhat more briefly, but to the same effect in these words; *Sacramentum est invisibilis gratiæ visibilis forma, ejusdem gratiæ imaginem gerens & causa existens*; both which definitions are acknowledged & applauded by the Jesuit *c Becanus*: And the plain truth is, a Sacrament cannot be better expresst in so few words, than it is by *d* St. *Austin* when he calls it *verbum visibile*, a visible Word or Gospel: For it pleased the Divine Wisdom and Goodness by this Institution of Sacraments to condescend to our Weakness, and thereby to give us sensible Tokens or Pledges of what he had promised in his written Word, to the intent that our Dulness might be relieved, and and our Faith assisted; forasmuch as herein, our Eyes and other Senses as well as our Ears are made Witnesses of his gratious Intentions. Thus by Baptismal washing he gives us a sensible token and representation of our Regeneration, and the washing away of our Sins by the Blood of Christ; and by the participation of Bread and Wine in the Lords Supper we have a Token and Symbol of our Union with Christ, our Friendship with God and Communion with each other.

a Hugo de S. Vict. lib. de Sacram.

b Magist. Sent. lib. 4. dist. 1.

c Becan. Tract. 2. de Sacram.

d Aug. c. Faust. Lib. 19. C. 16.

But now it is manifest there is no such thing as this in the Sacrament of Penance (as even *Bellarmine* himself confesses.) For they do not say or mean that the Absolution of the Priest is a Token or Emblem of Gods Forgiveness, but that the Priest actually pardons in Gods stead; by virtue of a Power delegated to him. So that according to them, here must be a Sacrament, not only without any material parts instituted, but also without any thing figurative, symbolical or significative, which seems to be as expressly contrary to their own Doctrine in the aforesaid Definitions as to the Truth it self.

Nay,

Nay, further to evince the difference of this Rite of Penance from all other proper Sacraments; it deſerves obſervation, that whereas in thoſe other acknowledged Sacraments, the Prieſt in Gods Name delivers to us the Pledges and Symbols of Divine Grace. Here in this of Penance we muſt bring all the material Parts and Pledges our ſelves, and preſent them to God, or to the Prieſt in his ſtead: My meaning is, that whereas (for inſtance) in Baptiſm the Prieſt applies to us the Symbol of Water, and in the Euchariſt delivers to us the conſecrated Elements in token of the Divine Grace, contrary-wiſe here in Penance we muſt on our parts bring with us Contrition, Confeſſion, and Satisfaction too, in which reſpect we may be rather ſaid to give Pledges to God, than he to us; which is widely different from the Nature of other Sacraments, and ſeems no leſs to be contrary to the Reaſon and Notion of a Sacrament in general.

The Sum of what we have hitherto diſcourſed amounts to this; Firſt, That here is no Auricular Confeſſion inſtituted by our Saviour, *Joh.* 20. 22. as was pretended. Secondly, Nor, any Sacrament of Penance in which it can be included or implied; no nor indeed any Sacrament at all.

I confeſs, I might have ſpared all the words I have uſed in proving the latter: for ſo long as I have made appear, that private Confeſſion is not inſtituted, it was not ſo very material to conſider whether Penance could be a Sacrament or no; but this I added to ſhew the imperious dictates of that Church, and their extravagancy in impoſing the moſt Sacred Names upon their own Inventions, thereby to give them the greater Veneration with the people.

And thus I would diſmiſs the firſt part of my undertaking, but yet the *Romaniſts* will not forego their pretenſions for Auricular Confeſſion; for they will yet urge, that whether or no we will call it a Sacrament which our Saviour inſtitutes in the Text before us, it is however certain here is a Power conferred on the Apoſtles, and their Succeſſors, of Remitting and Retaining Sins; for by theſe words, *Whoſoever Sins ye remit, they are remitted,* &c. * Our Saviour hath made the Prieſt a Judge of Mens Conſciences and Conditions; wherefore, that he may not proceed blindly and indiſcriminately, it is neceſſary that he know the merits of the Cauſe, and not only underſtand the matter of Fact, but all the Circumſtances which may aggravate or extenuate it, all which cannot be attained without the Confeſſion of the party; therefore Auricular Confeſſion is as neceſſarily

* *Chriſtus conſtituit Sacerdotes ſui ipſius Vicarios.* Seſſ 14. *Præſides & Judices,* ibid. 4. *Sacerdos ſilvit peccata poteſtate quadam prætoria* Bellarm. *lib.* 1. *de Sacram. c.* 10. *Chriſtus ratam habet ſententiam à Sacerdote latam, ibid. lib.* 3. *c.* 2.

ceſſarily implied in the Text, as Abſolution or Retention of Sins is expreſt in it. So they.

But I crave leave to demand in the firſt place, Is it certain that upon ſuch a Confeſſion as they require, the Prieſt (as ſuch) will be able to make a right Judgment of a Mans caſe that addreſſes himſelf to him, eſpecially conſidering the Intricacy of ſome Caſes, and the Ignorance of ſome Prieſts; upon this account are thoſe memorable words of St. *Auſtin, Conf. ſſ. lib.* 10. *c.* 3. *Quid mihi ergo eſt cum hominibus ut audiant Confeſſiones meas, quaſi ipſi ſanaturi ſint omnes languores meos, & unde ſciunt cum à meipſo de meipſo audiunt, an verum dicam? Quando quidem nemo ſit hominum quid agitur in homine, niſi ſpiritus hominis qui in ipſo eſt.* i. e. *To what purpoſe ſhould I confeſs my Sins to Men, who cannot heal my wounds? For how ſhall they (who know nothing of my heart but my own Confeſſion) know whether I ſay true or no? For no one knows what is in Man, but the Spirit of Man that is in him.* O yes, they will ſay *clave non errante*, that is to ſay, if he judge right, he judges right, and no more, and this is mighty comfort to a diſtreſſed Conſcience.

Secondly, Though we grant our Saviour hath given the Prieſt Authority to remit and retain Sins, yet how doth it appear that this extends to Secret Sins; Sins in thought only, or, as the Council expreſſes it, againſt the Ninth and Tenth Commandments? Of open Sins and publick Scandals the Church hath cognizance, and hath a Right which ſhe may inſiſt upon, or recede from, if ſhe ſee cauſe, becauſe ſuch Sins are an injury to the Society, as well as an offence againſt God, and therefore here the Officers of the Church may diſpenſe her Authority, and remit or retain (as we ſhall ſee more by and by;) but in Secret Sins where only God is injured, and to which he is only privy, what hath the Church to do, unleſs they be voluntarily diſcovered to her? Otherwiſe they are properly reſerved Caſes to the Tribunal of God.

Thirdly, I would be bold to enquire further, why may not ſins, eſpecially ſuch as we laſt named, be remitted upon Confeſſion to God, without Confeſſion to the Prieſt alſo? And I the rather ask this for theſe two reaſons; Firſt, I obſerve that this very Council of *Trent* ſaith, that until the times of our Saviour, and his Inſtitution of this Sacrament, ſins were remitted upon Contrition only, and application to the mercies of God, without Auricular Confeſſion. They cannot therefore now ſay, remiſſion implies this Confeſſion, for that cannot be ſaid to be implied in the nature of a thing, when the thing it ſelf can be had without it.

Seſſ. 14. *c.* 1.

They will anſwer that it is ſufficient, that it is now made neceſſary by our Saviour. But I reply, Then that Inſtitution which now makes it neceſſary

ceſſary, muſt be better proved then yet it hath been, or elſe men will be very apt to hope they may now under the Goſpel obtain Pardon (at leaſt) upon as eaſy terms as it was to be had before.

My ſecond reaſon of asking that third Queſtion is this; I obſerve that their own Schoolmen acknowledge Sins to be remitted under the Goſpel by the Prieſt without any Confeſſion to Men, particularly in the Adminiſtration of Baptiſm, by which it plainly appears, that Confeſſion is not implied in the nature of Remiſſion, but one may be had without the other, and then why may not a Sinner, after Baptiſm hope for Pardon upon his contrite and devout application to the Word and Sacraments, without this new Device and Pick-lock of Conſcience, Auricular Confeſſion. *Aquinas Summ. part. 3. Q. 68.*

But ſo much for that.

Sect. 3. I proceed now to the ſecond thing propounded, namely, to inquire hiſtorically whether or no Auricular, or ſuch a Secret, and Sacramental Confeſſion, as aforeſaid. hath been of Conſtant and univerſal uſe in the Chriſtian Church, as the *Romaniſts* pretend, and as the Council of *Trent* aſſerts, *Seſſ.* 14. *Chap.* 5.

This Inquiry is not into matter of Law or Divine Right, as the former was, but of Fact only, yet nevertheleſs it is of great moment upon a double account:

1. Becauſe this is the ground which the Old *Roman* Canoniſts wholly went upon, (as I noted before;) they exploded all pretence of Divine Inſtitution in the caſe, as having more modeſty (it ſeems) then to pretend ſo high upon no better evidence, or at leaſt they contented themſelves to preſcribe for it only upon the authority of conſtant and univerſal practice; now if we ſhew the falſeneſs of this ground, as well as of the other, then will their Hypotheſis of Auricular Confeſſion have no foot to ſtand upon.

2. Becauſe the credit of what hath been already ſaid under the former head, doth very much depend upon this, and that Diſcourſe will be confirmed or impaired reſpectively to what ſhall be evidently made out in this ſecond point. Foraſmuch as if on the one ſide it be made apparent that ſuch a Rite hath been of conſtant uſe in the Chriſtian Church, it will afford a great preſumption that it took its riſe at firſt from Divine Inſtitution, notwithſtanding all we have offered to the contrary. So on the other ſide, if the Evidence here anſwer not the pretenſion, and no ſufficient footſteps of conſtant and univerſal practice appear: Then will all that which we have hitherto diſcourſed, be greatly ſtrengthed and confirmed; becauſe it is by no means probable, that if there had been a Divine Law in the caſe, that ſuch a thing would have been generally neglected by the Chriſtian Church. Now

Now for the clearing of this, though I am here only upon the defenſive, and ſo bound to no more than to examine the Proofs which the *Romaniſts* bring for their Pretenſions, yet I will deal ingenuouſly, as ſeeking not to find Flaws, but to diſcover the Truth, and therefore give theſe Inſtances as ſo many Reaſons for the Negative.

In the firſt place, I crave leave to premiſe this: If Auricular Confeſſion were ſo great a Goſpel Myſtery, ſo wonderfully efficacious a method of ſaving Souls, as to be typified in the Law (as the *Romaniſts* teach) as well as inſtituted in the Goſpel, and practiſed by the whole Church, one might ſeem juſtly to wonder how it comes to paſs that there ſhould be no mention, nor appearance of it in the whole courſe of our Saviours own Miniſtry; he uſed to be an Example, as well as a Law-giver to the Church, he waſhed his Diſciples Feet, before he enjoyned them to waſh one another; he exemplified the other Sacraments before he preſcribed his Apoſtles to adminiſter them, and one would have thought ſuch an Inſtance of his Example had been more neceſſary in this buſineſs of Penance, rather than any other, if it had been but to make way for the Underſtanding of ſo obſcure an Inſtitution; ſince eſpecially, one would have thought to find ſome Traces of this in the Miniſtery of our Saviour, becauſe he daily converſed with Sinners, he reproved them, inſtructed them, healed them, pardoned them, but never brought any of them to ſuch a Confeſſion as we are treating of; *viz.* To a particular enumeration of their Sins with the circumſtances, nor upon ſo doing formally abſolved them. His very Diſciples (ſome of which had been great Sinners) were admitted without it; the Woman of *Samaria* was told by him all that ever ſhe did, but ſhe was not brought on her knees to make her own Confeſſion; but moſt ſtrange of all it is, that the Woman taken in Adultery, when he had made her Accuſers ſlink away, was not privately brought to it; it may be they will ſay, there was no need of Confeſſion to him who knew all before, but yet it might have been neceſſary to bring theſe Sinners to be aſhamed of themſelves by that means to work Repentance, and fit them for Pardon, at leaſt if this Method had been of ſuch mighty uſe and wonderful neceſſity as is pretended.

2. But to let paſs that; in the next place it is matter of wonder, that nothing of this Practice appears in the Miniſtry of the Apoſtles; they went about preaching the Goſpel, calling Men to Repentance, erecting and governing Churches, but never ſet themſelves down in a Confeſſors Chair, for Penitents ſecretly to tell them in their Ear the Story of their vicious Lives; indeed we read, *Acts* 19. 18. That ſome came *confeſſing and ſhewing their Deeds*: but firſt it was voluntary, and in a fit of holy Zeal,

for

for we cannot find that they were required to do it, as of Sacramental Obligation; and beſides, the Confeſſion was publick before the Church, not clancular, and whiſpered in ſecret; it is true alſo, that St. *James*, *chap.* 5. 16. adviſes the Chriſtians to confeſs their faults one to another, (which is made a mighty evidence in this caſe;) but it is as true, that this was ſpoken in an extraordinary caſe, as appears *ver.* 14. in bodily ſickneſs and diſtreſs of Conſcience, they are adviſed to lay open their condition, in order to relief and ſuccour, by the more ardent and affectionate Prayers of thoſe who ſhould be made privy to it, but it is not made a ſtanding and univerſal rule for all men to comply with, whether they be ſick or well, in proſperity or adverſity, perplexed or quiet in their Conſciences, much leſs of Sacramental and neceſſary obligation, as in the *Roman* Church.

3. Let us go on in the next ages after the Apoſtles, for about two hundred years we find not one word of this kind of Confeſſion, which we enquire for. Indeed the writings of that time which are extant, are not many, but if this buſineſs had been of ſuch conſequence as is pretended, it is ſtrange that thoſe holy men, *Ignatius*, *Clemens*, and *Juſtin Martyr* ſhould not have any mention of it.

Indeed *Bellarmine* brings us one inſtance within this period, and that is from *Irenæus*, who ſpeaking of certain women who had been abuſed by *Marcion* the Heretick, ſaith they afterwards came and confeſſed all, with ſhame and ſorrow, to the Church. But what is this to the purpoſe? We diſpute not againſt publick Confeſſion, which is acknowledged to be truly Primitive, and we wiſh it had been conſtantly maintained in after-ages, it is only the neceſſity of Clancular Confeſſion that we are unſatisfied in, and this paſſage ſpeaks nothing at all to that caſe.

4. In *Tertullian*'s time, which was alſo much about two hundred years after our Saviour, we find great things ſaid of Confeſſion, but it is of that which was publick, and in the face of the Church, not to a Prieſt in a Corner; and this indeed was greatly incouraged and required by the holy Men of thoſe times, as that which in the caſe of open and ſcandalous ſins, freed the Church both from the guilt, and from the reproach of them, and in the caſe of ſecret ſins, was a means (by open ſhame) to bring men to Repentance, and ſo to Pardon. And the Confeſſion was principally directed to God, who was the perſon offended by the ſin, yet it was made before men to raiſe a fervency in their Prayers, as is noted before, and to obtain their effectual interceſſion with God on behalf of the penitent. This that ancient Writer makes manifeſt to be his ſenſe in his Book *de Pœnitentia* in theſe words, *Plerumque vero jejuniis preces alere, ingemiſcere, lachrymari, & mugire dies noctesque ad Dominum Deum tuum,*

Presbyteris ad volvi, & aris (or rather *charis*) *dei adgenicularis, omnibus fratribus legationes ſuæ deprecationis injungere, hæc omnia ex homologeſis ut pœnitentiam commendet*, &c. the penitent often joyns faſting to his prayers, weeps, wails, and moans night and day before God, caſts himſelf at the feet of the Prieſts, kneels to all holy people, and intreats all the Brethren to be his Interceſſors with God Almighty for his pardon: This is penitential Confeſſion, &c. And

Tert. Ap. c. 39

And in his Apology more plainly; *Coimus in Cœtum*, &c. *ibidem exhortationes, caſtigationes & cenſura divina nam & judicatur magno cum pondere ut apud certos de Dei conſpectu, ſummumq; futuri judicii præjudicium eſt ſi quis ita deliquerit ut à communione*, &c. *religetur*; we have (ſaith he) in our Eccleſiaſtical Aſſemblies, a ſpiritual Judicature, and with great gravity cenſure Offenders, &c. But I need ſay no more of this; for we have the Teſtimony of *Beatus Rhenanus*, one of the *Roman* Church, and of great inſight into Eccleſiaſtical Affairs, who gives us this account of *Tertullian* and his times, *nihil illum de clancularia illa pœnitentiâ loqui, quæ id temporis penitus ignorabatur*; there was no ſuch thing as ſecret or Clancular Confeſſion in uſe in *Tertullian*'s time, which was a thing not ſo much as known by the Chriſtian Church in thoſe days.

Beatus Rhenan. in præf. ad Tertul. de pœnitent.

5. To go a little lower, ſuch was the manner of proceedings in St. *Cyprian*'s time, as he himſelf deſcribes it, the ſinner by outward geſtures and tokens ſhew'd himſelf to be ſorrowful and penitent for his ſin, and then made humble Confeſſion thereof before the whole Congregation, and deſired all the Brethren to pray for him; which done, the Biſhop and Clergy laid their hands upon him, and ſo reconciled him: So it was alſo in *Origen*'s time, and once for all, to deliver the Cuſtom of the Church in thoſe times, touching this particular, I will add the words of the Hiſtorian, *Rei ad terram ſe pronos abjiciunt*, &c. they that are conſcious to themſelves to have offended, fall down flat upon the ground with weeping and lamentations in the Church, on the other ſide the Biſhop runs to them with tears in his eyes, and falls down to the ground, alſo in token of ſorrow and compaſſion, and the whole Congregation in the mean while ſympathizing with both, is overwhelmed with tears, &c.

St. Cyprian. lib. 3. Epiſt. 15.

Origen in Pſ. 37.

Sozomen lib. 7. cap. 16.

6. If we go lower yet to the times of St. *Chryſoſtom* and St. *Auſtin*, we find thoſe holy men ſpeaking very ſlightly of Confeſſion to men, ſo little did they think of Auricular Confeſſions being a Sacrament. St. *Auſtin*'s Judgment in the Caſe we have heard before, in the tenth Book of his Con-

St. Chryſoſt. ad Heb. Homil. 31 Id. in Serm de Confeſſ. & pœnit. &c.

Confeſſions, and third Chapter; and for the other, the Teſtimonies out of him are ſo many, and ſo well known, that I cannot think it neceſſary to tranſcribe them; and as for St. *Jerom* who lived about the ſame time, I think it ſufficient to repeat the account of *Eraſmus*, who was very converſant in his Writings, and indeed of all the other Fathers, and who had no other fault I know, but that he did uſe *Mordaci radere vero*, to be too great a Tell-truth; which ſure will not invalidate his Teſtimony; his words are theſe, *Apparet tempore Hieronimi nondum inſtitutam fuiſſe ſecretam admiſſorum Confeſſionem.— Verùm in hoc labuntur Theologi quidam parùm attenti, quòd quæ veteres ſcribunt de publica & generali confeſſione, ea trahunt ad occultam & longè diverſi generis, i. e.* It is evident (ſaith he) that in St. *Jerom*'s time (which was about four hundred years after our Saviour) there was no ſuch thing as ſecret Confeſſion in uſe; but the miſtake is, that ſome few later and inconſiderate Divines have taken the inſtances of general and publick Confeſſion then practiſed, for arguments of that Auricular Confeſſion which is now uſed, though quite of a different nature from it.

Thus we have traced the Current of Antiquity for four or five hundred years to ſearch for the Head of this *Nilus*, the ſource and riſe of that kind of Confeſſion which is ſo highly magnified by the Church of *Rome*, but hitherto we have found nothing of it, and this methinks ſhould be ſufficient to ſtagger an impartial inquirer, (at leaſt it is as much as can be expected in ſo ſhort a Treatiſe as this is intended to be) and may ſatisfy the unprejudicate, that there is as little of Antiquity to favour this Rite, as there is of Divine Inſtitution to be pleaded for it. But yet I know on the other ſide, that the *Romaniſts* pretend to bring abundance of Teſtimonies for it, and *Bellarmine* particularly goes from Century to Century with his Citations to preſcribe for the conſtant and uninterrupted uſe of it, but I do ſincerely think that theſe four following ſhort Obſervations will inable a man to anſwer them all.

1. I obſerve, that whereas this word *Exomologeſis* is commonly uſed by divers of the Fathers, as the Phraſe whereby they intend to expreſs the whole nature of Repentance in all the parts and branches of it, as is evident by the paſſage I cited out of *Tertullian de Pœnit.* even now, and is acknowledged by *Bellarmine* himſelf; nevertheleſs, meerly becauſe that word ſignifies Confeſſion properly, and nothing elſe, theſe *Romiſh* Sophiſters, where they find this word *Exomologeſis*, force it into an argument for that Confeſſion, which they contend for; and ſo ſeveral Diſcourſes of the Fathers, concerning Repentance in general, are made to be nothing but *Exhortations* to, or *Encomiums* of Confeſſion in particular, and that muſt be nothing elſe neither but Auricular Confeſſion, the thing in Que-

ſtion. A caſt of his skill in this way, *Bellarmine* gives us in *Irenæus*, the very firſt Author he cites for Auricular Confeſſion in the laſt quoted Book and Chapter of his Writings *De Sacramentis*.

2. Whereas the Novatians excluded all hopes of Repentance or Pardon for ſins committed after Baptiſm, but the true Church contrariwiſe admitted to hopes of Pardon upon their Repentance; upon this occaſion, when ſome of the Fathers juſtly magnify the advantages, and comfortableneſs of the true Church above the Schiſmatical, as that it ſet open a Door of Hope to thoſe who confeſſed their ſins, and applied themſelves to her Miniſtry: Hence theſe witty men will perſwade the world, that every true Church had a Confeſſors Chair, and ſuch a formal way of pardoning as they now practiſe at *Rome*; as if there was no remiſſion of Sin, where there was no Auricular Confeſſion, and as if all that excluded the latter, rejected the former too, and were no better than Novatian Hereticks; when-as in Truth, the power of the Keys is exerciſed in all the Miniſtries of the Church, and ſhe pardons and retains ſins, otherwiſe than by the Oracle of a particular Confeſſor, as we have ſeen already. This piece of jugling the ſame *Bellarmine* is alſo guilty of in his Citation of *Lactantius*.

Bellarm. de Pœnit. Lib. 3. *C.* 8.

3. Whereas the ancient Writers are much in the commendation of Confeſſion of ſins, whether it be to God or to the Church, but generally intending that which is publick, it is common with thoſe of the Church of *Rome*, to lay hold of all ſuch ſayings as were intended to perſwade to, and incourage publick Confeſſions, and to apply them to Auricular or Clancular Confeſſions, thus particularly the aforeſaid Author does by *Tertullian* in his Citation of him.

Id. Lib. 3. *C.* 6.

4. And Laſtly, Whereas it is alſo true that ſeveral of thoſe holy men of old, do in ſome caſes very much recommend Confeſſion of ſecret ſins, and perſwade ſome ſorts of men to the uſe of it, namely thoſe that are in great perplexity of Conſcience, and that needed Ghoſtly Counſel and Advice, or to the intent that they might obtain the aſſiſtance of the Churches Prayers, and make them the more ardent and effectual on their behalf, whereas I ſay, they recommended this as an expreſſion of Zeal, or a prudent expedient, or at moſt as neceſſary only in ſome caſes *pro hic & nunc*. Theſe great Patrons of Auricular Confeſſion do with their uſual artifice apply all theſe paſſages, to prove it to be a ſtanding and univerſally neceſſary duty, a Law to all Chriſtians, this is a very common fault amongſt them, and particularly St. *Cyprian* is thus miſapplied by the ſame forementioned Writer, *Lib.* 3. *Cap.* 7.

Hither

Hitherto inquiring into the most ancient and purest times of the Church, by the Writings of the Fathers of those times, we have not been able to discover any sufficient ground for such an Auricular Confession as the Church of *Rome* pretends to, much less for a constant and uninterrupted succession of it. But now after all I must acknowledge there is a passage in Ecclesiastical History which seems to promise us satisfaction herein, and therefore must by no means be slightly passed over without due consideration; it is the famous story of *Nectarius* Bishop of *Constantinople*, and Predecessor to St. *Chrysostom*, which hapned something less then four hundred years after our Saviour.

Socrat. Hist. Lib. 5. Cap 19. Sozomen Lib 7. C. 16.

The Story as it is related by the joint Testimony of *Socrates* and *Sozomen* runs thus: In the time of this *Nectarius*, there was (it seems) a Custom in that Church (as also in most others) that one of the Presbyters of greatest Piety, Wisdom and Gravity should be chosen Penitentiary, that is, be appointed to the peculiar Office of receiving Confessions, and to assist and direct the Penitents in the management of their Repentance: Now it happens that a certain Woman of Quality, stricken with remorse of Conscience, comes to the Penitentiary (that then was) and according to Custom, makes a particular Confession of all such sins, as she was conscious to her self to have committed since her Baptism, for which he according to his Office appointed her the Penance of Fasting, and continual Prayers to expiate her Guilt, and give proof of the Truth of her Repentance. But she proceeding on very particularly in her Confessions, at last amongst other things comes to declare that a certain Deacon of that Church had lien with her; upon notice of which horrid Fact, the Deacon is forthwith cashiered, and cast out of the Church: by which means the miscarriage takes air, and coming to the knowledge of the people, they presently fall into a mighty commotion and rage about it, partly in detestation of so foul an action of the Deacon, but principally in contemplation of the dishonour and scandal thereby reflected on the whole Church. The Bishop finding the Honour of the whole Body of his Clergy extremely concern'd in this accident, and being very anxious what to do in this case, at last by the Counsel of one *Eudæmon* a Presbyter of that Church, he resolves thenceforth to abolish the Office of Penitentiary, both to extinguish the present flame, and to prevent the like occasion for the future; and now by this means every man is left to the conduct of his own Conscience, and permitted to partake of the holy Mysteries at his own peril. This is the matter of Fact faithfully rendred from the words of the Historian; but this if we take it in the gross, and look no further then so, will not do much towards the deciding of the present

present Controversy, we will therefore examine things a little more narrowly by the help of such hints as those Writers afford us, perhaps we may make good use of it at last; and to this purpose,

1. I observe in the first place, that though at the first blush here seems to be an early and great example of that Auricular Confession which we oppose, forasmuch as here is not only the Order of the Church of *Constantinople*, for Confession to a Priest, but that to be of all sins committed after Baptism, and this to be made to him in secret; notwithstanding upon a more thorough view it will appear quite another thing from that pleaded for, and practised by the Church of *Rome*, and that especially in the respects following: First, In the Auricular Confession in the Story, there is some remainder of the ancient Discipline of the Church (whose Confessions used to be open and publick,) as I have shewed in that here a publick Officer is appointed by the Church to receive them, such an one as whose Prudence, and Learning, and Piety she could confide in for a business of so great nicety and difficulty, and it is neither left to the Penitent to choose his Confident for his Confessor, nor at large for every Priest to represent the Authority of the Church in so ticklish an Affair as that of Discipline, but to a publick Officer appointed by the Church for this purpose; so that Confession to him cannot be said to be private, seeing it is done to the whole Church by him. To confirm which, *Secondly*, This Penitentiary it seems was bound (as there was occasion) to discover the matters (opened to him in secret) to the Church, as appears in the Crime of the Deacon in the Story; there was no pretence of a Seal of Confession in this Case, as in the Church of *Rome*, by virtue of which a man may confess, and go on to sin again secretly, without danger of being brought upon the Stage, whatsoever the atrocity of his Crime be, and indeed without any effectual course in order to his Repentance and Reformation. Again, *Thirdly*, this confession in the Story doth not pretend to be of absolute necessity, as if a mans sins might not be pardoned without it; but only a prudent provision of the Church to help men forward in their Repentance, to direct the acts and expressions of it, and especially to relieve perplexed and weak consciences, and to assist them in their preparations for the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; and this appears, amongst other things, by the account which the Historian gives us of the consequence of abolishing it, *viz.* That now every man is left to his own conscience about his partaking of the holy Mysteries; but it is not said or intimated that he was left under the guilt of his sins, for want of confession. To which add in the last place, that this Office whatever it was, was not reputed a Sacrament, but rather, as I noted before, an expedient to prepare men for it; for doubtless neither that Bishop nor

that

that Church would have ever consented to the abolition of a Sacrament, for the sake of such a Scandal as happen'd in the mismanagement of it, or if they had done so, much less can it be imagined that the greatest part of the Christian Church would have concurred with them in it, as we shall by and by see they did.

2. I observe concerning the beginning of this Penitentiary Office, the time and occasion of this usage; namely, that the Historians do not pretend it to have been Apostolical, much less of first by Divine Institution; but they lay the Heat of its first rise about the time of the *Decian* Persecution, which was about Two hundred years after our Saviour. I confess, *Nicephorus* would perswade us of its greater Antiquity, and that it was rather revived than instituted at that time; for he speaking of the bringing it into use at the *Decian* Persecution saith, [illegible], *i. e.* the Church pursuant of the ancient Ecclesiastical Canons constituted a Penitentiary, *&c.* And *Petavius* is so addicted to the *Roman* Hypothesis, as very unreasonably to favour this Conceit; but the Truth seems to be (as *Valesius* very ingeniously acknowledges) only this, that here was a mistake of the import of the words of the Historian, who saith only, that when the Church had chosen their Penitentiary [illegible], they added him to the Canon, that is, to the number of those in the *Matricula*, or Roll of such as were to be maintain'd in and by the Church, or as we would say, they made him Canon of the Church; not that he was constituted in such an Office, pursuant of an ancient Law or Canon, as *Nicephorus* carelessly or wilfully mistakes. Besides afterwards, when the Historian observes that the Novatians universally withstood this Order from the beginning of it, he calls it [illegible], *q. d.* this new Institution, or Addition, or Supplement of the Ancient Rites of the Church; so that there is no reason we should date this Institution higher than the Historian doth, namely, after the *Decian* Persecution.

But what should be the ground and reasons of erecting this new Office, and Officer in the Church then, if it was not before? Of this I give two accounts.

First, The Church being very numerous, and the Zeal and Devotion very great; and what by the compassionate reception which the Church gave to Penitents, and her ardent Prayers for them, what by the earnest Harangues of Holy Men to move people to Repentance, abundance were inclined to confess their Sins, and this Confession being till that time accustomed to be open, and publick in the face of the Congregation, it must needs happen (all those circumstances considered together) that a great many things would be brought upon the Stage, the

Publication of which would be attended with great inconveniences; for some Sins are of that nature, that they scarce can take Air without spreading a Contagion, some Confessions would make sport for light and vain persons, and besides abundance of other inconveniences (easie to be imagined by any one) the publication of some Sins might expose the Penitents to the severity of the Pagan Criminal Judge; upon these and such like considerations, the Church thought fit therefore (as I have intimated before) to appoint one wise and very grave person in her stead to receive the Confessions; who by his discretion might so discriminate matters, that what things were fit for silence, might have private methods applied to them, but what were fit to be brought upon the Stage, might be made publick examples of, or receive a publick remedy.

Secondly, But the Historian leads us to a more special reason of this Institution at that time; namely, that the rage of the *Decian* Persecution cruelly shook the Church, and abundance of her weaker members fell off in the storm, and, which was worst of all, the Church was distracted about the restitution or final rejection of those that had so miscarried; for though the best and wisest of the Church were so merciful and considerate of humane infirmity, as to be willing to receive those in again, upon Repentance; over whom the Temptation of Fear had too much prevailed, yet the Novatians, a great and zealous part of Christianity, looked upon such as desperate, who had once broken their Baptismal Vow, and would rather separate from the Church themselves, than suffer such to be restored to it. Here the Church was in a great strait, either she must be very severe to some, or she shall seem very unkind to others, she must either let the weak perish, or she must offend them that counted themselves strong. Now in this case she being both tenderly compassionate towards those that had fallen, and withal willing to satisfie those Novatian Dissenters, or at least to deliver her self from Scandal, takes this course, she requires that those who had fallen, and desired to be restored again to her Society, should acknowledge their faults, and make all the Penitent satisfaction that was possible for them to perform, that so neither they may be too easily tempted to do so again by the gentleness of the remedy, nor the Novatians reproach her Lenity, or take pet, as if no difference was made between the sound and the lapsed; for these causes, though the most publick Penance was thought little enough to be undergone by the lapsed, but yet on the other side, considering wisely the inconveniences of publick Penance in some cases (as I specified before) she therefore took this middle course, namely, she appointed a publick Confessor, who having first heard privately the several cases of the Penitents, should bring into publick, only such of them as without incurring

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any of the aforeſaid dangers) might be made exemplary. And this appears to be the true reaſon of this Inſtitution, and the bottom of this affair, by this remarkable paſſage in the Hiſtorian; That whereas the generality of the Orthodox cloſed preſently with this wiſe temperament, the novatians only, thoſe ſelf-conceited Non-conformiſts, rejected τὸ ἐπιτίμιον τοῦτο, this expedient as a new invention; they were too humourſome to comply with ſuch a temperament.

But here another queſtion ariſes, *viz.* How far this new expedient was imbraced by the Orthodox Churches; for if it was only received by that of *Conſtantinople*, the Authority would not be ſo great; for it is impoſſible to imagine, that other Churches might allow every private Prieſt to confeſs, and ſo admit of no publick Penitentiary.

To which I anſwer, that by the Hiſtory it ſeems plain enough, that this was not the peculiar manner of the Church of *Conſtantinople* only, but the uſual method in that time of moſt other Churches alſo; but, I muſt needs ſay, I do not find that the Church of *Rome* complied with them herein, though it was not much to her Honour to be ſingular, where there was ſo much prudence and piety to have inclined her to uniformity. However this is gained, which is my point, that the Church of *Rome* is not countenanced in her practice of private and clancular Confeſſions, by the general uſage of the Church, as they pretend.

3. I obſerve concerning this Office of Penitentiary, that as it was erected upon prudential conſiderations, ſo it was upon the ſame grounds aboliſhed, by the ſame authority of the Church which firſt inſtituted it, and that after about two hundred years continuance in the time of *Nectarius*, as we have ſeen; and therein he was followed, ſaith *Sozomen* by almoſt all the Biſhops and Churches in the World; this therefore was far from being thought either a Divine or Apoſtolical Conſtitution: *Petavius* would here perſwade us, that it was only publick Confeſſion, and not private, which was upon this occaſion ſo generally laid aſide, as we have ſeen, but this is done by him more out of tenderneſs of Auricular Confeſſion, than upon good reaſon; and *Valeſius* goes beyond him, and will needs perſwade us, that neither publick nor private Confeſſion were put down in this juncture, but only that the lately erected Officer of Penitentiary was caſhiered; but I muſt crave leave to ſay, there is no ſufficient reaſon for either of theſe conjectures, but on the contrary plain evidence againſt them; for *Socrates*, who is the firſt and principal relater of this whole ſtory, ſaith he was perſonally acquainted with this Preſbyter *Eudemon*, who gave the advice to *Nectarius* to make this change in the Diſcipline of the Church, and that he had the aforeſaid relation of it from his own mouth, and expo ulated with him about it, giving his rea-

ſons to the contrary, and ſuggeſted his ſuſpicions that the ſtate of Piety would be much endamaged by this change, and in plain words tell him, that he had now bereſt men of aſſiſtance in the conduct of their Conſciences, and hindred the great benefit men have, or might have one of another by private advice and correption. Now this fear of his had been the abſurdeſt thing in the World, if upon this counſel and advice of his, only one certain man in the Office of publick Confeſſioner had been laid aſide, but both the uſe of publick and private Confeſſions had been kept up and retained.

But after all (for ought appears) the Church of *Rome* kept her old Mumpſimus, ſhe tenacious of her own cuſtoms, eſpecially of ſuch as may advance her Intereſt and Authority, complies not with this Innovation or Reformation (be it for better or worſe) but her Prieſts go on with their Confeſſions, and turn all Religion almoſt into Clancular Tranſactions, in deſpight of the example of other Churches. It may be ſhe met with oppoſition ſometimes, but ſhe was forced to diſſemble it till the heroick age of the Schoolmen, and then thoſe luſty Champions with their Fuſtian-ſtuff of *videtur quod ſic*, *& probatur quod non*, make good all her pretenſions. After them in the year 1215 comes the fourth *Lateran* Council, and that decrees Auricular Confeſſion to be made by every body once a year at the leaſt; and laſt of all comes the Council of *Trent*, and declares it to be of Divine Inſtitution, neceſſary to Salvation, and the conſtant and univerſal cuſtom of the Chriſtian Church: And ſo we have the Pedigree of the *Romiſh* Auricular Confeſſion.

Sect. 4. I come now to the third and laſt Stage of my undertaking, which is to ſhew that ſecret or Auricular Confeſſion, as it is now preſcribed and practiſed in and by the Church of *Rome*, is not only unneceſſary, and burdenſom in it ſelf, but alſo very miſchievous to Piety, and the great ends of Chriſtian Religion.

For the former part of this charge, if it be not evident enough already, it will eaſily be made out from the premiſes, for they cannot deny that they make this kind of Confeſſion neceſſary to Salvation, at leaſt as neceſſary as Baptiſm it ſelf is, (ſuppoſing a man hath ſinned after Baptiſm) now if it be neither made ſo by Divine Inſtitution, nor acknowledged to be ſo by the conſtant Opinion of the Church, what an horrible impoſition is here upon the conſciences of men, when in the higheſt and worſt ſenſe that can be, they teach *for Doctrines the Commandments of Men*, and make Salvation harder than God hath made it, and ſuſpend mens hopes upon other terms then he hath done? If it was preſcribed by the preſent Church as a matter of Order and Diſcipline only, or of convenience and expediency, we ſhould never boggle at it upon this account,

count, or diſpute the point with them; or if it was only declared neceſſary *pro hic & nunc*, upon extraordinary emergency, by the peculiar condition of the Penitent, his weakneſs of judgment, the perplexity of his Conſcience, his horrible guilt or extreme agonies, we would not diſſent with them upon that neither; but when it is made neceſſary univerſally, and declared the indiſpenſible duty of all men whatſoever who have ſinned after Baptiſm (when God hath required no ſuch thing but declares himſelf ſatisfied with true contrition and hearty remorſe for what is paſt, and ſincere Reformation for the time to come;) this I ſay is an intolerable tyranny and uſurpation upon the conſciences of men. And that is not all neither, for beſides its burdenſomneſs in the general, it particularly aggravates and increaſes a mans other burdens, for inſtead of relieving perplexed Conſciences, which is the true and principal uſe of Confeſſions to Men, this prieſtly Confeſſion as it is preſcribed by the Council, intangles and afflicts them more; for that injoyns that the Penitent lay open all his ſins, even the moſt ſecret, although but in thought or deſire only, ſuch as againſt the ninth or tenth Commandment, (according to their Diviſion of the Decalogue,) now this is many times difficult enough; but that's not all, he muſt alſo recount all the circumſtances of theſe ſins, which may increaſe or diminiſh the guilt, eſpecially ſuch as *alter the ſpecies and kind* of ſin: Now what ſad work is here for a melancholy Man? All the circumſtances are innumerable, and how can he tell which are they that change the ſpecies of the act, unleſs he be as great a Schoolman as his Confeſſor. Beſides all this, it may be he is not very skilful in the diſtinction between venial and mortal ſins, and if he omit one mortal ſin, he is undone; therefore it is neceſſary for him (by conſequence) to confeſs all venial ſins too, and then where ſhall the poor Man begin, or when ſhall he make an end? Such a *Carnificina* ſuch a rack and torture, in a word, ſuch an holy Inquiſition is this buſineſs of Auricular Confeſſion become. And that Eminent Divine of *Strasburgh* (of whom *Beatus Rhenanus* ſpeaks) ſeems very well to have underſtood both himſelf, and this matter who pronounces that *Scotus* and *Thomas* had with their tricks and ſubtilties, ſo perplexed this plain buſineſs of Confeſſion, that now it was become plainly impoſſible. And ſo much for that.

But as for the ſecond part of this impeachment, *viz.* That the Auricular Confeſſion now uſed in the Church of *Rome*, is miſchievous to Piety; This remains yet to be demonſtrated, and we will do it the rather in this place, becauſe it will be an abundant Confirmation of all that which hath been diſcourſed under the two former Heads; and might indeed have ſaved the labour of them, but that we were unwilling to leave any pretence of theirs undiſcuſſed; for if this practice of theirs appear to be

miſchievous to Piety, it will never by any ſober man be thought either to have been inſtituted by our Saviour, or to have been the ſenſe and uſage of the Catholick Church, whatever they pretend on its behalf.

Now therefore this laſt and important part of my Charge I make good by theſe Three Articles following.

Firſt, This Method of theirs is dangerous to Piety, as it is very apt to cheat people into an Opinion that they are in a better condition than truly they are, or may be in towards God, as that their ſins are pardoned, and diſcharged by him, when there is no ſuch matter. The Churchmen of *Rome* complain of the Doctrine of ſome reformed Divines touching aſſurance of Salvation, that it fills men with too great confidence, and renders them careleſs and preſumptuous; but whatſoever there is in that, it is not my buſineſs now to diſpute it, however methinks it will not very well become a *Romaniſt* to aggravate it, till he have acquitted himſelf in the point before us; for by this Aſſurance Office of theirs they comply too much with the ſelf-flattery of Mens own Hearts, they render Men ſecure, before they are ſafe, and furniſh them with a confidence like that of the Whore *Solomon* ſpeaks of, *who wipes her Mouth, and ſaith, I have done no evil.* For Men return from the Confeſſors Chair (as they are made to believe) as pure as from the Font, and as innocent as from their Mothers Womb; as if God was concluded by the act of the Prieſt, and as if he being ſatisfied with an humble poſture, a dejected look, and a lamentable murmur, God Almighty would be put off ſo too.

Ah! nimium faciles qui triſtia crimina, &c.

Ah! cheating Prieſts, who made fond Men believe,
That God Almighty pardons all you ſhrieve.

Perhaps they will ſay, This is the fault and folly of the Men, not of the Inſtitution of the Church: But why do they not teach them better then? Nay, why do they countenance and incourage them in ſo dangerous miſtakes? For whether elſe tend thoſe words in the Decree of the Council of *Trent*, *Ipſi Deo reconciliandis? q. d.* that by this way of Confeſſion, *&c.* Men are reconciled to the Divine Majeſty himſelf; or thoſe other forecited, where the Prieſt is ſaid to be the *Vicar of Chriſt, and in his ſtead*, a Judge or Preſident; or eſpecially what other meaning can thoſe words have, where it is ſaid, that

Seſſ. 14. *Can.* 1.

Ibid. Cap. 5.

this

this Rite, is as neceſſary as Baptiſm, for as in that all ſins are remitted which were committed in former time, ſo in this all ſins committed after Baptiſm are likewiſe remitted? Ibid. Cap. 2.

Now, I ſay, what is the natural tendency of all this, but to make people believe that their Salvation or Damnation is in the power of the Prieſt, that he is a little God Almighty, and his Diſcharge would certainly paſs currant in the Court of Heaven. But there is Sophiſtry and Juggle in all this, as I thus make appear; for,

1. The Prieſt cannot pardon whom he will, let him be called *Judex* and *Preſes* never ſo; for if his Sentence be not according to Law, it will be declared Null at the Great Day; only it may be good and valid in the mean time *in foro Eccleſiæ*; and here lies the Cheat.

2. Nor are all ſins retained or unforgiven with God, that are not pardoned by the Prieſt; it is true in publick Scandals, till the Sinner ſubmit to the Church, God will not forgive him; *For what that binds in Earth is in this ſenſe bound in Heaven*; but what hath the Church to do to retain, or to bind the Sinner in the caſe of ſecret Sins, where it can charge no Guilt on him?

3. Nor is it properly the act of the Prieſt which pardons, but the Tenor of the Law, and the diſpoſition of mind in the Penitent agreeable thereunto, qualifying him for Pardon, to which the Pardon is to be imputed: As it is not the Herald which pardons, but the Prince who by his Proclamation beſtows that Grace upon thoſe who are ſo and ſo qualified.

4. Nor, laſtly, Can the Prieſt be ſaid to pardon ſo properly by thoſe Majeſtick words, *abſolvo te*, as by his whole Miniſtry, in inſtructing people in the Terms of the New Covenant, and making application of that to them by the Sacraments; this he hath Commiſſion to do, but thoſe big words I cannot find that he hath any where Authority to pronounce, and therefore (as I think I obſerved before) the ancient Church had no form of Abſolution, but only receiving Penitents to the Communion: And the *Greek* Church had ſo much Modeſty as to abſolve in the third Perſon, not in the firſt, to ſhew that their Pardon was Miniſterial and Declarative only.

All theſe things notwithſtanding the people are let to go away with ſuch an Opinion as aforeſaid (becauſe it is for the Grandeur and Intereſt of the Prieſthood, that they ſhould be cheated;) but theſe miſapprehenſions would vaniſh, if their Teachers would be ſo juſt as to diſtinguiſh between Gods Abſolution, and the Abſolution of the Church; the firſt of which extends to the moſt ſecret Sins, the latter to open Scandals only; the one delivers from all real Guilt, the other from external Cenſure

Cenſure only; of the latter the Prieſt may (by the leave of the Church) have the full Diſpenſation, ſo that he is really pardoned with her that hath ſatisfied the Prieſt; but of the former he diſpenſes but conditionally. To confirm all which I will here add only two Teſtimonies of the Judgment of the ancient Church.

The firſt is of *Firmilianus* Biſhop of *Cæſarea* in his Epiſtle to St. *Cyprian*, reckoned the Seventy fifth of St. *Cyprian*, where ſpeaking of holding Eccleſiaſtical Councils every Year, he gives theſe Reaſons for it; *Ut ſi qua graviora ſint communi conſilio dirigantur, lapſis quoque fratribus, & poſt lavacrum ſalutare a Diabolo vulneratis, per pœnitentiam medela quæratur; nec quaſita nobis remiſſionem peccatorum conſequantur, ſed ut per nos ad intelligentiam delictorum ſuorum convertantur, & Domino plenius ſatisfacere cognoſcant.* Partly (ſaith he) *that by joint advice, and common conſent, we may agree upon an uniform Order in ſuch weighty affairs as concern our reſpective Churches, partly that we may give relief, and apply a remedy to thoſe, who by the Temptation of the Devil have fallen into ſin after Baptiſm; not that we can give them Pardon of their Sin, but that by our Miniſtry they may be brought to a knowledge of their Sins, and directed into a right courſe to obtain Pardon at the Hands of God.* The other is of *Theodorus* Arch-Biſhop of *Canterbury*, whoſe Words are theſe: *Confeſſio quæ ſoli Deo ſit purgat peccata: Ea vero quæ Sacerdoti fit, docet qualiter purgemur. Confeſſion to God properly obtains the Pardon of Sin; but by Confeſſion to Men, we are only put into the right way to obtain Pardon.* Thus they.

Theod. Cantuar. *apud* Beat. Rhen. *in Præf. ad* Tertull. *de Pœnit.*

But now in the Church of *Rome* the caſe is otherwiſe; there the Prieſt ſuſtains the Perſon of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt himſelf, and is not ſo much his Delegate as his Plenipotentiary, and his Pardon is as full & good as if the Judge of the World had pronounced it *pro Tribunali*; ſo that if the moſt lewd and habitual Sinner have but the good fortune to go out of the World under the Bleſſing of his Ghoſtly Father, that is to ſay, either Death came ſo ſoon after his laſt Abſolution, or the Prieſt came ſo opportunely after his laſt Sin, that he hath not begun a new ſcore, he is ſure to go to Heaven without more ado. This I repreſent as the firſt miſchief attending their Doctrine, and Practice of Auricular Confeſſion. But this is not all, for

Secondly, It corrupts and debauches the very Doctrine and Nature of Repentance which the whole Goſpel lays ſo much ſtreſs upon: Making Attrition (which is but a ſlight ſorrow for ſin, or a diſlike of it in Contemplation of the Wrath of God impendent over it) paſs for Contrition, which implies an hatred and deteſtation of it for its own moral evil and deformity, with a firm reſolution of amendment. This they

they many of them are not ashamed to teach, and their practice of Absolution supposes and requires it. The Jesuits in particular, who have almost ingrost to themselves the whole Monopoly of Confessions avow this as their Principle. Father *Bauny*, *Escobar*, and *Suarez* declare their Judgement, that the Priest ought to absolve a Man upon his saying, that he detests his Sin, although at the same time the Confessor doth not believe that he does so. And *Caussin* saith, *If this be not true, there can be no use of Confessions amongst the greatest part of Men.*

These things (it's true) are disliked by some others of the *Romanists*, and the *Curees* of *France* are so honest as to cry shame of it before all the World; for, say they, Attrition is but the work of Nature, and if that alone will serve for Pardon, then a Man may be pardoned without Grace. But therefore, say the others, the Sacrament of Penance doth it alone, and this is for the Honour of the Sacrament; greatly for the Honour of it (say I) that it is of greater Power than our Lord Jesus Christ, and his Gospel, which cannot help a wicked Man to Heaven, whilst he continues so, but this Sacrament it seems can. Nor can they excuse this matter by saying these odious Assertions are but the private Opinions of some Divines. For they are plainly favoured by the determinations of the Council of *Trent*; I confess that Council delivers it self warily and cunningly in this point (as it uses to do in such cases) yet these are their words, *Illa vero contritio imperfecta quæ attritio dicitur, quamvis sine Sacramento Pœnitentiæ per se ad justificationem perducere peccatorem nequeat, tamen eum ad Dei Gratiam in Sacramento Pœnitentiæ impetrandam disponit*, &c. Which is as much as to say, though Attrition or a superficial sorrow for sin, barely, alone, and without confession to a Priest, will not justify a man before God, yet Attrition and Confession together will do it, for then they are as good as true Repentance. And in this sense *Melchior Canus* long since thought he understood the Council well enough. *Conc. Trident. Sess.* 14. *C.* 4.

Thirdly, This business of Auricular Confession, as it is practised in the Church of *Rome*, is so far from being a means to prevent and restrain sin, as it highly pretends to be (and I am sure as it ought to be, if it be good for any thing) that contrariwise it is either lost labour, and a meer Ceremony, or it greatly incourages and imboldens, and hardens men in it, both by the secrecy, the multitudes, and the frequency of these Confessions, by the cursory, hypocritical and evasive ways of confessing, by the slight Penances imposed, and the cheapness, easiness, and even prostitution of Absolutions.

It were easy to be copious in instances of all these kinds, but it is an uncomfortable subject, and I hasten to a conclusion; therefore I will only touch upon them briefly.

1. For

1. For the privacy of these Confessions. In the ancient Church (as I have noted before) the scandalous sinner was brought upon the Stage before a great assembly of grave and holy men, he lay prostrate on the ground, which he watered with his Tears, he crept on his knees, and implored the pitty and prayers of all present, in whose countenances (if for shame he could look up) he saw abhorrence of his fact, indignation at Gods dishonour, conjoined with compassion to his soul, and joy for his Repentance; his Confession was full of remorse and confusion; the remedy was as sharp and disgustful to flesh and blood as the Disease had been pleasant, and the pain of this Expiation was able to imbitter the sweet of Sin to him ever after. Or if the Confession was not made before the whole Church, but to the Penitentiary only, yet he was a grave and holy person, chosen by the Church, and representing it, a person resident in that Church, and so able to take notice of, and mind the future conversation of those that addressed themselves to him; a person of that sanctity and reverence, that he could not choose but detest and abhor all base and vile actions that should come to his knowledge: Now it must needs be a terrible cut to a Sinner to have all his lewdness laid open before such an one, and then to be justly and sharply rebuked by him, to have his sins aggravated, and to be made to see his own ugly shape in a true glass held by him, besides to be enjoined the performace of a strict Penance of Fasting and Prayer, and after all (if this do not do) to have the Church made acquainted with the whole matter (as in the case of the Deacon aforesaid. This course was likely to work something of remorse in the Sinner for what was past, and to make him watchful and careful for the time to come.

But what is the way of the Church of *Rome* like to this? Where a man may confess to any Priest, to him that knows him not, and so cannot observe his future life and carriage; nay, perhaps that knows not how to value the guilt of sin, or to judge which be venial, and which mortal Sins, or especially what circumstances do alter the species of it, and it may be too, he may be such an one that makes no Conscience himself of the sins I confess to him. Now, when all is transacted between me and such a Priest in a corner, and that under the inviolable Seal of Confession, what great shame can this put me to? What remorse is it likely to work in me? What shall discourage me from going on to *sin again, if no worse thing happen to me?*

2. And then for the multitude of Confessions in the Church of *Rome*, that also takes off the shame, and weakens the efficacy of it, so that if it do no harm, it is not likely to do any good; for who is concern'd much in the doing that which he sees all the world do as well as himself, if only

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notorious Sinners were brought to Confession (as it was in the Primitive Church) then it might probably and reasonably provoke a blush, and cause a remorse in him to whom such a remedy was prescribed; but when he sees the whole Parish, and the Priest too brought to it, and men as generally complying with it, as they approach to the Lord's Table; what great wonders can this work? what shame can it inflict upon any man! what effect can be expected from it, but that it ordinarily makes men secure and careless, and grow as familiar with sin, as with the remedy, or at least think as well of themselves as of other men, since it seems they have as much need of Confession and Absolution as himself?

3. To which the frequency and often repetitions of these kind of Confessions adds very much; it is very likely that modesty may work much upon a man the first or second time he goes to Confession, and it may something discompose his countenance when he lays open all his secret miscarriages, to a person especially for whom he hath a Reverence (for we see every thing, even sin it self is modest in its beginnings;) and no doubt it is some restraint of sin whilst a man is sensible that he must undergo a great deal of pain and shame in vomiting up again his sweet morsels which he eats in secret: But by that time he hath been used to this a while, it grows easy and habitual to him, and custom hath made the very punishment pleasant as well as the sin; especially, if we add,

4. The formal, cursory, hypocritical, and illusive ways of Confession in frequent use amongst them; as that a man may choose his own Priest, and then to be sure the greatest Sinner will have a Confessor right for his turn, that shall not be too severe and scrupulous with him; that a man may confess *in transitu*, in a hurry or huddle, and then there can be no remark made upon his person nor his sins; that a man may make one part of his Confession to one Priest, and reserve the other part for another, so that neither of them shall be able to make any thing of it; that he may have one Confessor for his mortal sins, and another for his venial; so that one shall save him, if the other damn him; nay, for failing, the forgetful Sinner may have another man to confess for him, or at least he may confess, that he hath not confessed. These and abundance more such illusive methods are in daily use amongst them, and not only taken up by the licentious and unconscionable people, but allowed by some or other of their great Casuists: now let any Man judge whether this be a likelier way to restrain sin, or to encourage it; whether the easiness of the remedy (if this be one) must not of necessity make the Disease seem not very formidable? In a word? whether this be not a ridiculing their own Religion, and, which is worse, a teaching men to be fool-hardy, *as to make a mock of sin.*

5. This ſad reckoning will be inflamed yet higher, if we conſider the ſlight Penances uſually impoſed by theſe ſpiritual Judges upon the greateſt Crimes. The Council determines that the Confeſſor muſt be exactly made acquainted with all the circumſtances of the ſin, that ſo he may be able to adjuſt a Penance to it; now when ſome great ſin is confeſſed, and that in very foul circumſtances, if the Penance proportioned to it, by the Prieſt, be to ſay two or three *Pater Noſters*, or *Ave-Maria*'s extraordinary, to give a little Money in Alms to the Poor, or ſome pious uſe, to kneel on his bare knees before ſuch a Shrine, to kiſs ſuch an Image, to go on pilgrimage a few miles to ſuch a Saint, or at moſt to wear an Hair-Shirt, or it may be to faſt with Fiſh, and Wine, and Sweetmeats, *&c.* doth not this make that ſin which is thus mawled and ſtigmatized, look very dreadfully; can any man find in his heart to ſin again, when it hath coſt him ſo dear already?

Oh! but they will tell us, theſe Penances are not intended to correſpond with the guilt of the ſin, but only to ſatisfy the debt of temporal puniſhment. But we had thought that the end of Penance had been, to work in the Penitent a diſpoſition for Pardon, by giving him both opportunities and direction to expreſs the ſincerity of his Repentance; and this was the uſe of Penance in the Primitive Church, together with the taking off the Scandal from the Society; and for that other end how doth the Church of *Rome* know ſo certainly that there is a debt of temporal puniſhment remaining due, after the ſin is pardoned before God; it is true, God may pardon ſo far only as he pleaſes, he may reſolve to puniſh temporally thoſe whom he hath forgiven eternally, as we ſee he did in the caſe of *David*; but that this is not his conſtant method, appears by this, that our Saviour releaſes the temporal puniſhment to many in the Goſpel, whoſe Diſeaſes he cured, ſaying to them, *Your ſins are forgiven you*, when as yet it did not appear that all ſcores were quitted with God ſo, but that they might have periſhed eternally, if they did not prevent it by Faith and Repentance.

6. But laſtly, to come to an end of this ſad ſtory, the eaſineſs and proſtitution of their Abſolutions in the Church of *Rome* contributes as much to the encouraging of Vice, and careleſneſs in Religion, as any of the former; for what elſe can be the natural effect and conſequence of that ruled caſe among their Caſuiſts (as I ſhew'd before) that the Prieſt is bound to abſolve him that confeſſes, and ſaith, he is ſorry for his ſin, though he doth in his heart believe that he is not contrite, but that either the Prieſts Pardon is a very cheat, or elſe that Pardon is due of courſe to the moſt impenitent Sinner, and there is no more to do but *Confeſs and be Saved*? or what is the meaning of their common practice to abſolve men upon

upon their Death-beds, whether they be contrite, or attrite, or neither, at leaſt when they can give no Evidence of either? If they intended this only for abſolution from the Cenſures of the Church it might be called Charity, and look ſomething like the practice of the primitive Church, which releaſed thoſe upon their Death-beds, whom it would not diſcharge all their lives before, tho not then neither without ſigns of Attrition and contrition too; but theſe pretend to quite another thing; namely to releaſe men *in foro conſcientiæ*, and to give them a Paſs-port to Heaven without Repentance, which is a very ſtrange thing, to ſay no worſe of it. Or to inſtance one thing more, what is the meaning of their practice of giving Abſolution before the Penance is performed (as is uſual with them) unleſs this be it, that whether the Man make any Conſcience at all how he lives hereafter, yet he is pardoned as much as the Prieſt can do it for him, and is not this a likely way of reformation.

I conclude therefore now upon the whole matter that Auricular Confeſſion, as it is uſed in the Church of *Rome*, is only an Artifice of greatening the Prieſt, and pleaſing the people; a trick of gratifying the undevout and impious as well as the Devout and Religious; the latter it impoſes upon by its outward appearance of Humility and Piety; to the former it ſerves for a palliative Cure of the Gripes of Conſcience which they are now and then troubled with; in reality it tends to make ſin eaſy and tolerable by the cheapneſs of its Pardon, and in a word, it is nothing but the old Diſcipline of the Church in Duſt and Aſhes. And therefore though the Church of *England* in her Liturgy, piouſly wiſhes for the Reſtauration of the Ancient Diſcipline of the Church, it can be no defect in her that ſhe troubles not her ſelf with this Rubbiſh.

FINIS.

A POSTSCRIPT.

AFter I had finiſhed the foregoing Papers, and moſt part of them had alſo paſt the Preſs, I happened to have notice that there was a Book juſt then come over from *France*, written by a Divine of the *Sorbone*, which with great appearance of Learning maintained the juſt contrary to what I had aſſerted (eſpecially in the Hiſtorical part of this Queſtion) and pretended to prove from the moſt Ancient Monuments of the holy Scriptures, Fathers, Popes, and Councils, that Auricular Confeſſion had been the conſtant Doctrine, and univerſal and uninterrupted uſage of the Chriſtian Church for near 1300 years from the times of our Saviour to the *Lateran* Council.

So ſoon as I heard this, I heartily wiſhed, that either the ſaid Book had come out a little ſooner, or at leaſt that my Papers had been yet in my hands, to the intent that it might have been in my power to have corrected what might be amiſs, or ſupplied what was defective in that ſhort Diſcourſe, or indeed if occaſion were, to have wholly ſuppreſt it.

For as ſoon as I entred upon the ſaid Book, and found from no leſs a man than the Author himſelf, that he had diligently read over all that had been written on both ſides of this controverſy, and that this work of his was the product of eighteen years ſtudy, and that in the prime of his years, and moſt flouriſhing time of his parts, that it was publiſhed upon the matureſt deliberation on his part, and with the greateſt applauſe and approbation of the Faculty, I thought I had reaſon to ſuſpect, whether a ſmall Tract, written in haſte by a man of no Name, and full enough of other Buſineſs, could be fit to be ſeen on the ſame day with ſo elaborate a work.

But by that time I had read a little further, I took heart, and permitted the Preſs to go on; and now, that I have gone over the whole, I do here profeſs ſincerely, that in all that learned Diſcourſe, I ſcarcely found any thing which I had not foreſeen, and as I think in ſome meaſure prevented. But certain I am, nothing occurred that ſtaggered my judgment, or which did not rather confirm me in what I had written; for though I met with abundance of Citations, and a great deal of wit and dexterity in the management of them, yet I found none of them come home to the point; for whereas they ſometimes recommend and preſs Confeſſion of Sin in general ſometimes to the Church, ſometimes to the

Prieſt

Priest or Bishop as well as to God Almighty: Again, sometimes they speak great things of the Dignity of the Priesthood, and the great Honour that Order hath in being wonderfully useful to the relief of guilty or afflicted consciences, other while they treat of the power of the Keys, and the authority of the Church, the danger of her Censures, the comfort of her Absolution, and the severity of her Discipline, &c. but all these things are acknowledged by us without laborious proof, as well as by our Adversaries: That which we demand, and expect therefore, is, where shall we find in any of the Ancient Fathers, Auricular Confession said to be a Sacrament, or any part of one? Or where is the universal necessity of it asserted? Or that secret sins committed after Baptism, are by no other means, or upon no other terms pardoned with God, then upon their being confessed to men? In these things lies the hinge of our Dispute, and of these particulars one ought in reason to expect the most direct and plain proof imaginable, if the matter was of such consequence, of such universal practice and notoriety as they pretend; but nothing of all this appears in this Writer more than in those that have gone before him. In contemplation of which I now adventure this little Tract into the World, with somewhat more of confidence then I should have done, had it not been for this occasion.

But lest I should seem to be too partial in the Case, or to give too slight an account of this Learned man's performance, the Reader who pleases shall be judge by a Specimen or two, which I will here briefly represent to him.

The former of them shall be the very first argument or testimony he produces for his Assertion, which I the rather make my choice to give instance in, because no man can be said ingenuously to seek for faults, to pick and choose for matter of exception, that takes the first thing that comes to hand.

The business is this, Chap. 2. Page 11. of his book he cites the Council of *Illiberis* (with a great deal of circumstance) as the first witness for his cause, and the testimony is taken from the Seventy sixth Cannon, the words are these, *Si quis diaconum*, &c. *i. e.* If any man shall suffer himself to be ordained Deacon, and shall afterwards be convicted to have formerly committed some Mortal (or Capital Crime;) if the said Crime come to light by his own voluntary confession, he shall for the space of three years be debarred the holy Communion, but in case his sin be discovered and made known to the Church by some other hand, then he shall suffer five years suspention, and after that be admitted only to Lay Communion.

Now who would have ever thought this passage fit to be made choice of

of as the firſt proof of Auricular Confeſſion, or who can imagine it ſhould be any proof at all, much leſs a clear or direct one?

Oh, but here is Confeſſion! it may happen ſo if the party pleaſe, but it is not enjoyned, but voluntary, and that not Auricular neither, but unto the Church, at leaſt for ought appears.

And it is confeſſion of a ſecret ſin too! True it was ſo, till it was either confeſſed or betrayed.

And here is Penance impoſed for a ſecret ſin: True when it was become publick.

And here is a different degree of Penance impoſed upon him that ingenuouſly confeſſes, from him that ſtays till he is accuſed, and hath his ſin proved upon him: And good Reaſon, for the one gave tokens of Repentance, and the other none. But then here is —— What? no Sacrament of Penance, no declared abſolute neceſſity of Confeſſion to men in order to pardon with God, but only a neceſſity that when the fact is become notorious, whether by the Confeſſion of the party, or otherwiſe, that the Church uſe her endeavours to bring the Sinner to Repentance, and free her ſelf from Scandal by making a differance betwixt the Good and the Bad, the more hopeful, and the leſs.

If this be a clear and proper Argument for the neceſſity of Auricular Confeſſion: God help poor *Proteſtants* that cannot diſcern it; but oh the wit of man, and the power of Learning and Logick! What may not ſuch Men prove if they have a mind to it?

The other paſſage I inſtance in, is in his tenth Chapter, Page 156 *viz.* the Critical and Famous buſineſs of the *Nectarian* Reformation at *Conſtantinople*, of which I have ſpoken ſomewhat largely in the foregoing Papers. Now for this: This Learned Gentleman after he hath acckowledged very frankly that publick confeſſion of ſins was the ancient uſe of of the Church in the times of St. *Irenæus*, *Tertullian*, *Cyprian*, and *Origen*; that is, for the ſpace of about three hundred years, and that inſtead of that ancient uſage (upon occaſion of the *Decian* Perſecution) a publick Penitentiary was appointed at *Conſtantinople*, and moſt other Orthodox Churches, and in ſhort, after he had with more ingenuity then ſome others of his party, owned the undoubted Truth of the Relations of *Socrates* and *Sozomen* touching this Affair, and made ſome Obſervations thereupon not much to the advantage of his cauſe, he at length delivers that which would be very much to his purpoſe, if it could be credible; namely; that upon the whole matter *Nectarius* in aboliſhing the Penitentiary, neither aboliſhed publick nor private Confeſſions, but inſtead of obliging men to go to the Penitentiary left every man bound to reſort to his reſpective *Dioceſan*, and confeſs his ſins to him; and ſo Auricular Confeſ-

Confeſſion is after this change every whit as neceſſary as it was before; very true (ſay I) it is as neceſſary now as it was before, for it was only voluntary before, and ſo it may be after. But if the intention of *Nectarius*, and the effect of that alteration was only the change of the Perſon, and every man ſtill obliged to confeſs to ſome body, how comes it to be ſaid in the ſtory that every man was left to his own Conſcience, doth that word ſignify the Biſhop? then we have found out a right Fanatick *Dioceſan*, for they will all readily confeſs to this Biſhop, and believe his Abſolution as ſufficient as any *Romaniſt* of them all doth: And yet it ſeems to be undeniably plain that *Socrates* after this Reformation thought of no other Confeſſor but this, nor imagined men now bound to make any other Confeſſion, but this (which if it was not Auricular was very ſecret) for otherwiſe how comes it to paſs that he expoſtulates the matter with *Eudæmon*, who adviſed this change, and bewail'd the danger of this liberty which was hereby given men, if they were as ſtrictly bound ſtill to confeſs to their Biſhop as they were before to the Penitentiary; therefore the Truth of the buſineſs ſeems evidently to be this, that men were now at liberty to make their Confeſſions of ſecret ſins voluntarily, as they were no doubt before the Inſtitution of a Penitentiary. And now what hath this Learned Gentleman gotten by muſtering up this ſtory; well, however the concluſion muſt be held, let the Premiſſes look to themſelves.

I could find in my heart (now my hand is in) to proceed further, and to obſerve what pittiful ſhifts he is put to in his thirteenth Chapter, to evade the Teſtimonies brought by Monſieur *Daillé* out of St. *Chryſoſtom* againſt his *Hypotheſis*. And the rather becauſe (out of meer tediouſneſs of writing) I in the foregoing Papers omitted to ſpecify the moſt remarkable Diſcourſes which that Excellent Author hath upon this ſubject. But the Authorities are ſo plain and unanſwerable, and the Evaſions of this Gentleman ſo forced and palpable, that I think it needleſs to go about to vindicate the one, or confute the other; for in ſpight of Art this ſame thirteenth Chapter (we ſpeak of) will afford no leſs than thirteen Arguments againſt the neceſſity of Auricular Confeſſion.

FINIS.